

Abstract

Since gaining independence, a number of African governments have responded to protect citizens from drought-induced threats of famine. Government relief has either involved limited disbursements of food aid and large income restoring labour-intensive public works programme for the able bodied (labour-based relief), or the universal distribution of free food aid (free food aid). This paper examines why some African governments select policies of universal food relief, while others adopt food-for-work or work-for-cash programmes. Through the use of the concept of the vulnerability of political incumbency, I explore the factors that shape policy selection by political leaderships. This idea is then tested in Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe. I find that that the political status of incumbents determines whether government relief comes in the form of universal aid or labour-based relief.

Keywords: Botswana, food aid, drought, relief policies, political incumbency

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